New Nouveau Brunswick CANADA

News Release

Communications New Brunswick

N.B. Human Rights Commission

Op-ed / Human rights are good for business (04/10/25)

NB 1183

Oct. 25, 2004

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following op-ed article was issued today by Alanna Palmer, chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission.

FREDERICTON (CNB) - Employers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified workers. Human rights best practices can help them overcome this obstacle.

This problem was illustrated recently by Enterprise Fredericton. Its 2003 Employer Survey found that employers in the Greater Fredericton area are facing increased difficulty filling available jobs. One of the reasons cited is competition with other industry sectors for the qualified labour force.

This news comes as no surprise to those in the field of labour force development. For some time now, they have predicted that the 'new workforce' is coming.

Who is this new workforce? And what do they want?

In New Brunswick and across Canada, the workforce is becoming more female and older, with more people with disabilities and of diverse cultures.

Statistics Canada data shows that, between 1991 and 2001, the number of women in the labour force grew at twice the pace of men. During that same period, the percentage of Canadians aged 45 to 64 grew from 20 to 25 per cent.

Statistic Canada also projects that, by 2016, employed people with disabilities will comprise eight per cent of the total workforce and that, by 2011, immigration will account for all of Canada's labour force growth.

One way for employers to meet their workforce needs is to hire from groups that have a high unemployment rate, such as persons with a disability and aboriginal persons. Another way is to implement working conditions that attract the new workforce.

Workers with disabilities want to have their needs reasonably accommodated so that they can have the chance to contribute their skills to society. That is what is guaranteed to them by the *Human Rights Act,* provided it does not cause undue hardship to their employer.

Women want the same employment opportunities as men, as well as working environments that are free

of sexual harassment. Both men and women want workplaces that are flexible and that are family-friendly, from pregnancy to caring for aging family members.

As workers age, they want respect for the special contributions that life experiences bring.

Aboriginal persons and immigrants bring a richness that comes with cultural diversity. They want to be embraced and a workplace that respects their religious practices and holidays, for example.

Employers benefit from reduced absenteeism and increased productivity when they have harassment-free workplaces where the value of the contributions of their diverse workforce is recognized.

The other positive spin-off for businesses is that they become 'employers of choice' for the new workforce. This reputation goes a long way in recruiting and retaining the new employees which they need to prosper.

While weaving these basic human principles into the fabric of a workplace is not a cure-all, human rights best practices result in real savings for businesses. That is one of the key messages the Human Rights Commission wants to communicate over the next year.

04/10/25

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04/10/25

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